

Reclaiming Māori Systems approaches across the East Cape; Te Kura Mana Māori o Whangaparāoa



Healthy Families East Cape Rautaki Māori Jade Kameta with Ngā Kaiako o Te Kura Mana Māori o Whangaparāoa

“Ko te Kuti, ko te Wera, ko te Haua, e ko Apanui”

Kura, iwi, hāpu, whānau, and communities are championing Maramataka in their school curriculums, events and activities throughout the Eastern Bay of Plenty region and across the country.

By Ranui Maxwell

Te Kura Mana Māori o Whangaparāoa have been harnessing local knowledge to embed Maramataka into their kura curriculum.

Adapting school terms and holidays to align with Maramataka, considering the low and high phases of the marama.

For three years, the kura spent time observing and gathering evidence that told a story of when tamariki were productive, and less productive and analysing this in conjunction with the productivity of the taiao. Alongside this, the kura has utilised knowledge and teachings from local iwi, hāpu and whānau experts.

They have revived Maramataka knowledge from iwi, hapū, whānau, and teachings from the late Wiremu Tawhai and his book *‘Living By The Moon’* Te Maramataka a Te Whānau-ā-Apanui. Tawhai refers to the knowledge inherited through observations and listening through hands-on experience and through trailing and testing their knowledge to prove its validity.

Healthy Families East Cape Rautaki Māori, Jade Kameta has been working with Te Kura o Whangaparāoa to support their growth in understanding the maramataka, and how to improve their practice of maramataka in their kura. Healthy Families East Cape will continue to utilise these examples of systems change through maramataka and mātauranga Māori and how it impacts our health and well-being to ensure these are retained throughout the rohe. The kura, alongside other areas of the community that are embracing the Maramataka are already observing behavioural shifts in our people, and in settings that have otherwise been influenced by western thinking.

When settlers arrived in the 19th century, they brought with them the Gregorian calendar, a timekeeping system from the northern hemisphere driven by religion and commerce, things that have no association with our environment. Māori had a strong connection to their environment, which shaped their language, culture and identity. According to Dr Rangi Matamua (2021), “When you impose on someone else’s timekeeping system it completely changes the way they interact with their environment, it completely changes the way they understand their culture, identity, and way of being, even their language changes.” This undoubtedly affected their health and well-being. Māori followed the Maramataka, a timekeeping system in place that was informed by solar (sun) lunar (moon), stellar (stars) and tidal (waters) to create an environmental calendar. This timekeeping system also acknowledges the circadian rhythm of our body, rising with the sun and sleeping when the sun sets. Our circadian rhythm promotes quality sleep and overall health and well-being.

“It’s been a natural progression from what the kura has done over the years planning around the seasons, based around what kai is available. Working together to provide for our whānau, hapū, and iwi. It brought home to our kura whānau and staff what is most important in life for our tamariki.” says Maani Waititi (kaiako).



Healthy Families East Cape has an explicit focus on returning to Māori health systems that benefit the health and wellbeing of all people across Te Tairāwhiti and Aotearoa.

We have had many opportunities over the last two years to collect the benefits that the maramataka plays in reconnecting people’s relationships with the natural environment. For example, in Whiro, we reset by staying indoors, reflecting on the previous month and planning for the month ahead; in Ohoata, that time tells us that it’s a good time to plant something in the ground so it can grow; you can also do that by starting something new, such as an activity or initiative. During the Tamatea phases, we’re more curious, alert, and flexible with plans and activities because we know the phase is unpredictable, but we don’t lose sight of our monthly goals. During Rākaunui, we prioritise physical activity, learning outside in the Taiao, and taking advantage of the full moon. During Korekore, we prioritise wānanga, and extra research spending more time indoors. From Tangaroa to Orongonui, we plan events and harvest from the whenua or moana, we do as much as we can because we know the time is productive.

Then, we reset and restart the process when Whiro returns. There are also many ways in which people are also connecting the kaupeka (seasons) of the year. You can connect by aligning kaupapa to the hua o te wā (seasons fruits) or harvesting the kai of the season.

Likewise, when we are in hōtoke (winter) colds and flu are at their peak. The kura shuts down as it is time for rest, for traditional school terms, holidays are observed in Hineraumati (summer). The Maramataka informs us that Hineraumati is a time of productivity. Aligning school terms to the Maramataka allows for health prevention pathways.

Maramataka brings the activation of traditional knowledge of Te Whānau-ā-Apanui into practice. The Kura are embracing the learning opportunities by holding Kura Pō (night school) meaning that the following day the students and teachers will take the day off. Kura Pō also provides an opportunity for the taiao (natural environment) to become the classroom and strengthening the innate connection between people and our natural environment.

Other strategies the kura are implementing to elevate Maramataka in their curriculum including knowledge exchanges with other indigenous peoples who also follow a similar knowledge system.

Continued research into Māori issues, traditions and institutions will inevitably lead to international forum, where a struggle ensues for the recognition and the validation of indigenous knowledge.

The First Nations peoples of Canada and the United States of America, the Inuit of Alaska, the Hawaiians, the Saami people of Norway, the Dreamtime people of Australia are all involved in the reclamation and the revitalisation projects concerning their cultures.

We as indigenous people of New Zealand, must continue to contribute to and be part of this global resurgence in indigeneity.

Healthy Families East Cape look forward to continuing our mahi alongside the Kura and with our communities to ensure Maramataka practices are revived throughout our region. If you would like to learn more about the Maramataka, please contact Jade Kameta by email jade@healthyfamilieseastcape.co.nz.

References: Tawhai, W, Living By The Moon, Te Maramataka A Te Whānau a Apanui (2015)

